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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1875
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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2311
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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TAGS: [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: LIMITED EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0704
[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0812

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Young people graduating from Turkmenistan's system of secondary education, as well as those who participated in exchanges, are often frustrated by too few opportunities for employment or advancement to higher education. Very restrictive university entry requirements (including the need to speak fluent Turkmen), the lack of employment opportunities, and the need for government connections to get a job are forcing many families to seek futures for their children outside of Turkmenistan. END SUMMARY.

FEW EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND LOW WAGES

[1](#)3. (SBU) Employment opportunities are few and far between, especially for students coming straight out of secondary school and from foreign universities. The need to speak fluent Turkmen and low-paying wages force some of the best and brightest young people, returning from top foreign universities, to accept work way below their skill level. For example, one individual currently works for a U.S.-based non-profit organization in a field unrelated to his undergraduate and graduate degrees rather than deal with the extremely low wages and bureaucratic rules for promotion for teachers in local schools and universities. In order to qualify for promotion from a base salary as a music teacher, he would have to work for a minimum of five years as an entry-level teacher with a salary that, on average, ranges from \$175 to \$211 a month. New graduates often face the choice between working in their field or making an adequate living. This is further complicated by the fact that jobs are difficult to find under most circumstances.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Doctors face similar problems. In many instances, they choose to leave Turkmenistan for other countries, especially Russia, or apply for more lucrative positions in other lines of work, when available. There is more than one local employee at the Embassy who was trained as a doctor,

some even in specialty fields, who can make more money working in GSO than at a local hospital. One local employee's brother moved to Russia to start an Ear, Nose, and Throat practice, because he could not make enough money as a doctor in Turkmenistan.

MANY STUDENTS CANNOT QUALIFY FOR TURKMEN UNIVERSITIES

15. (SBU) There is great demand for admission into Turkmenistan's institutions of higher learning, because students are guaranteed jobs upon graduation. In order to get into a university or institute, the student has to meet the "real" admissions requirements as well as any academic qualifications. Students need to know someone to get into the school, and bribes remain common and costly. Furthermore, students are required to speak fluent Turkmen in order to qualify for admission, which poses a hurdle for many non-ethnic Turkmen students. Each year there are approximately 110,000 secondary school graduates who compete for approximately 6,500 slots for admission to local Turkmen universities and intergovernmental programs to study abroad in Russia, Turkey, China, and Malaysia.

16. (SBU) Many parents, especially those that are not ethnic Turkmen, speak of their frustration and the need to send their children to other countries in order to attain a post-secondary education, primarily because of the language requirement for admission. And there are some ethnic Turkmen families that feel more comfortable using Russian. Since Russian-language classes (coursework taught in Russian) in schools have a better reputation for educating students,

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parents try to get their children into these classes. (COMMENT: It is very difficult for children with two Turkmen parents to get into the Russian-language classes. Nevertheless, parents are willing to pay bribes so that their children can get in those courses. END COMMENT.) Despite the good foundational education the children receive, they often graduate without fluency in Turkmen. Families in this situation have no other choice but to send their children to Russia or other countries to attend university. Predictably, many do not return to Turkmenistan, further adding to the country's "brain drain."

17. (SBU) When the choice is made to send a child abroad, families may have to split in order to give their children better opportunities than are available in Turkmenistan. For example, one man's wife is Russian, and he sent his entire family to Russia in order to give his oldest son the opportunity to get a higher education. The boy could not qualify for Turkmen universities due to the language requirement. The father said that he plans to join them after he is able to save some money, and he stated that there are no opportunities for children in Turkmenistan, especially if they only speak Russian. He has two other children in Turkmenistan who he will have to leave behind in order to be with his wife and younger children. Such choices are not uncommon in Turkmenistan, and they occur nationwide.

FOREIGN-EDUCATED STUDENTS OFTEN LEAVE TURKMENISTAN

18. (SBU) Another woman sent both of her children to universities in Russia, also because they do not speak Turkmen. Neither child is particularly interested in returning to Turkmenistan, and both are pursuing studies in areas that are not practical for finding jobs in Turkmen society. One is studying psychology, which, as his mother put it, is impossible to use in a place like Turkmenistan. The woman's daughter continues to work in Russia in areas unrelated to her field of study in order to continue her education, and she will likely remain there after she graduates.

19. (SBU) One U.S.-educated student, who returned at the beginning of July, found a job in her field of study,

architecture. However, she does not plan on staying in Turkmenistan for long, because she is not able to use most of her portfolio and has no options other than low-paid government work. Another student works in Afghanistan, because she is unable to find a job in Turkmenistan. She only returns to visit her family. Educated Turkmen often turn to international organizations and businesses in order to earn wages that match their education levels, unless they hold a particularly valued skill, such as architecture. Without opportunities in Turkmenistan, students leave for better ones wherever they can find them.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite efforts at reform, economic and educational opportunities for young people remain limited. There is significant frustration with the lack of jobs in the private sector, the inability to use much of the knowledge obtained abroad, and the need to know someone in order to get a decent paying job. As long as this remains the case, many of the country's best and brightest may try to seek their fortunes abroad. END COMMENT.
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